

# The ABC's of HIV



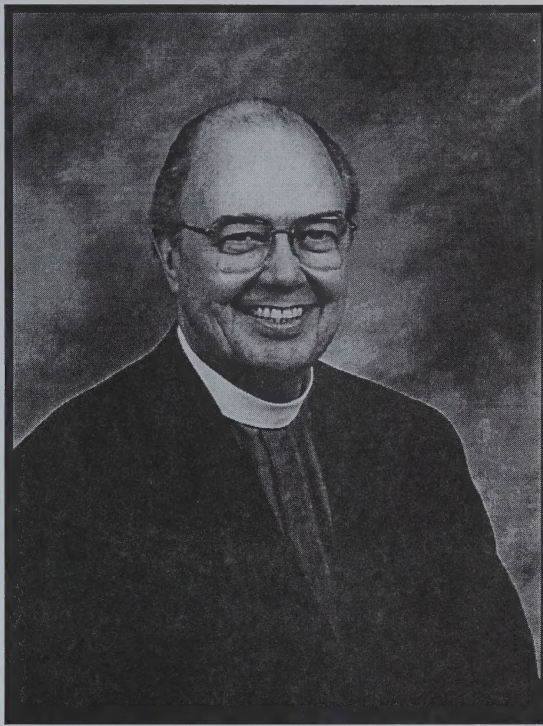
The Cathedral of St. Philip

May 11, 2002

9:00 AM - 4:30 PM







The HIV/AIDS Task Force of  
The Cathedral of St. Philip  
proudly dedicate our educational seminar

The ABC's of HIV

to

**The Reverend Canon Thomas H. Conley**

A man of God, a man of extraordinary vision, a man of compassion, a man of charity towards all people. Canon Conley has been our compelling leader whose direction, insights, and courage have made us go forward. Without Tom's faith, belief in us, as well as his remarkable people skills, we would never have survived.

For the many hours of 100% dedication to our efforts, we salute Tom Conley.





# THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. PHILIP

Serving the City and Diocese of Atlanta

May 11, 2002

Dear Participant in the HIV/AIDS Conference:

Welcome to the Cathedral of St. Philip and this educational presentation on HIV and AIDS. We hope you will find grace and peace here today. You have already received greetings from Bishop Alexander and Dean Candler. Let me add my voice of welcome and thanksgiving to theirs. Your coming enriches us today.

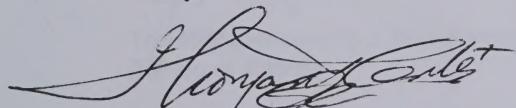
The purpose of this conference is not only to provide education and to prompt awareness of the scope of the problem, but also to inspire us all to act wherever we can to prevent the spread of this disease that effects us all.

Our thanks to David Holcomb and Peggy Freeman for their serving as co-chairs of the Task Force that composed the program for the day. To all the other members who gave time, energy and wisdom, our profound gratitude.

Our Christian faith requires us to care for others and to be involved in the well-being of the entire human family. To that end do we dedicate this conference today.

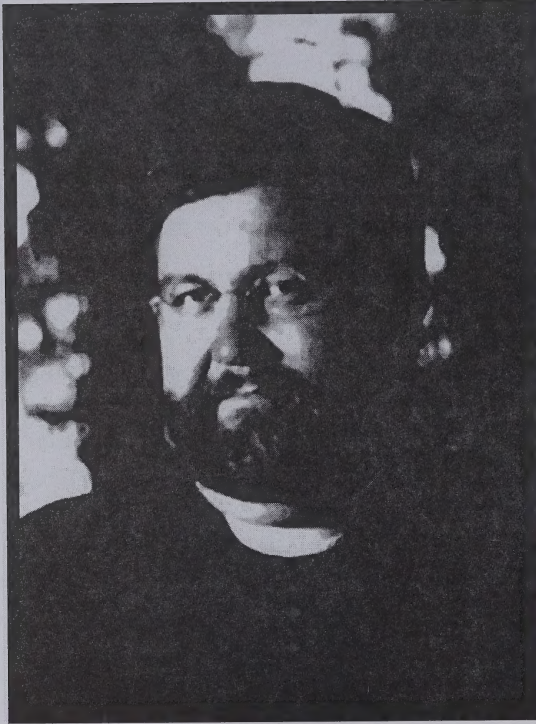
May this be a blest day in your journey, and may we together make a difference in the battle with this disease that has brought such blight to the human family. May we be empowered to do everything we can to alleviate the suffering and pain brought to us from HIV/AIDS. God bless you.

Sincerely,



The Rev. Canon Thomas H. Conley





## The 9th Bishop of Atlanta

The Right Reverend J. Neil Alexander



## The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Atlanta

Dear friends and fellow pilgrims:

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

I am pleased to have the opportunity to welcome you to today's conference. The work you will do today is an important contribution to the continuing response of our church to the ongoing crisis of HIV/AIDS.

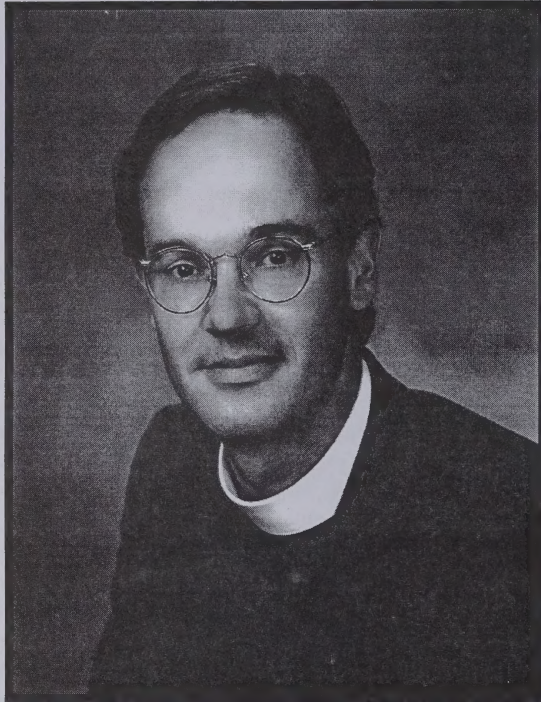
It has been twenty years since the first cases of HIV/AIDS took center stage in our lives. Since the early 1980's, HIV/AIDS has touched the lives of countless persons, their friends, their families, their communities, and their churches. None of us has been left untouched, directly or indirectly. In the early years, the fast and widespread educational efforts around HIV/AIDS were nothing short of miraculous...a great testimony to what people can do when they put their minds and hearts and resources together. Medical advances have made positive contributions to the lives of persons who have become infected and made possible for many a continuing quality of life. We cannot, however, allow these and other short-term successes in the fight against HIV/AIDS allow us to become complacent. *There is much still to be done!* Not only in our own country, but around the world where the ravages of HIV/AIDS are being felt with full force. There is a widespread assumption that somehow we have licked this insidious killer and that we can relax. That assumption is dead wrong. We cannot rest.

I am pleased that you are here and that your interest and commitment continues. We need you, your strength, your talent, and most of all your devotion to the effort. I am grateful.

Faithfully, in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Neil Alexander", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Right Reverend J. Neil Alexander  
Bishop of Atlanta



The Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler





# THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. PHILIP

Serving the City and Diocese of Atlanta

Office of the Dean

Grace to you, and Peace, in Jesus Christ our Lord!

On behalf of the people of this parish, I welcome you to the sacred space of this Cathedral. It is our mission to serve the city of Atlanta through outreach and as a gathering place both culturally and socially for the community.

We welcome you today as leaders in the faith community striving to learn more about the ways in which we can respond pastorally to those affected by HIV/AIDS, and also use our positions in the community to affect public policy and awareness.

Finally, I hope that you will return to the Cathedral of St. Philip for other occasions of service and prayer. This is a house of prayer for all people, and your presence here helps us fulfill that mission.

With every blessing,

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip





JOHN LEWIS  
5TH DISTRICT, GEORGIA  
CHIEF DEPUTY DEMOCRATIC WHIP

COMMITTEE:  
WAYS AND MEANS  
SUBCOMMITTEES:  
HEALTH  
OVERSIGHT



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-1005**

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FAX: (404) 331-0947

May 11, 2002

Greetings:

As Georgia's Fifth Congressional District Representative, I am pleased to welcome the ABC's of HIV at the Cathedral of St. Philip.

The U.S. government is funding millions of dollars in efforts to fight AIDS through research, drug development and awareness. I am especially grateful to the Cathedral of St. Philip for their willingness to share information and education about AIDS and its prevention.

You have my best wishes for a successful event.

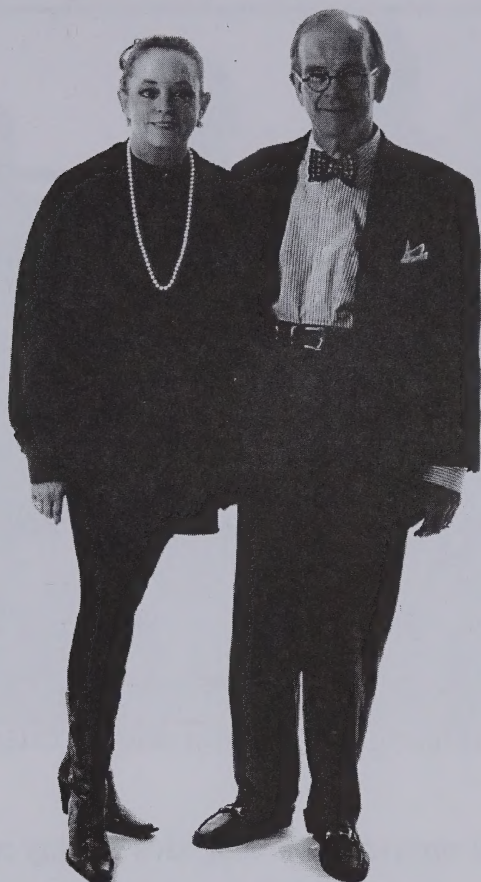
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Lewis".

John Lewis  
Member of Congress

JL:rr





The Co-chairs of  
The ABC's of HIV  
an educational seminar  
The Cathedral of St. Philip

Peggy Freeman

David Holcomb



The HIV/AIDS Task Force of  
the Cathedral of St. Philip

Our Mission:

To provide education about the HIV virus and its prevention;  
to provide care to those affected by the virus;  
to increase awareness of the Episcopal Church's policies and programs relating to the international crisis of HIV/AIDS;  
to promote and provide opportunities for lay ministry and volunteerism to those affected by HIV/AIDS;  
and to reach out through the Cathedral parish, the Diocese, and the city of Atlanta to assist in the effort to eradicate HIV/AIDS in the world.



## The HIV/AIDS Task Force Committee

### Pictured:

Peggy Freeman, Ray Mills, Jean Robertson,  
David Holcomb, Betsy Sparks, Stephen Douglas

### Not Pictured:

Stephen Holton, David Isbel, Jeff Bonnell,  
Phil McDonald, Bobby Helton, Brad Norton

# **THE ABC's of HIV**

## **Taller educacional sobre el SIDA**

**Tendrá lugar en la Catedral de San Felipe el 11 de mayo, sábado de 9 a 4:30 de la tarde. El taller es gratuito y se invita a toda la comunidad.**

**Se iniciará a las 9 de la mañana con un desayuno continental gratis. El almuerzo también será gratuito.**

- 1. Presentación de "Secrets" patrocinada por Kaiser Permanente.**
- 2. "Visión general del SIDA", por Felicia Guest de la Universidad de Emory.**
- 3. Después del almuerzo hablará Jeanne White la madre de Ryan White, (el niño que contrajo la enfermedad en una transfusión de sangre y luego fue rechazado por toda la sociedad, incluidas las iglesias y las escuelas, para, al final terminar siendo un héroe nacional)**
- 4. A continuación siete personas hablarán sobre cómo sus agencias o iglesias ofrecen ayuda a quienes sufren de esta enfermedad.**

**John Scott, presidente de la fundación "Elton John de hollywood".**

**Gail Evans de "Childkind".**

**Stephen Woods del proyecto "Open hand".**

**Craige Washington de la comunidad africo-americana.**

**María Rivas de "AID Atlanta" (SIDA), programa para Hispanos.**

**Sam Candler, deán de la Catedral de San Felipe.**

**Jeanne White.**

**Los asistentes tendrán la oportunidad de interrogar a los oradores.**

**Catedral de San Felipe  
2744 Peachtree Road NW  
Atlanta, GA 30305  
404-365-1078**



## Program of May 11, 2002

- 9:00 Sign In; Continental Breakfast
- 9:30 Welcome: The Very Rev. Sam Candler
- 9:35 A play: "Secrets" followed by questions and answers
- 10:45 Medical Overview: Felicia Guest, Emory University
- 11:20 John Scott, President of Elton John Foundation
- 11:45 Lunch Break
- 12:35 Jeanne White: Speech, Slides & Video
- 1:45 Break
- 2:00 The Very Rev. Sam Candler, Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip
- 2:10 Craig Washington, representing the African American Community
- 2:20 Tony Braswell, representing AID Atlanta
- 2:30 Gail Evans, representing Childkind
- 2:40 Stephen Wood, representing Project Open Hand
- 2:50 Maria Rivas, representing the Latino Community & AID Atlanta
- 3:00 Judy Parker, representing AIDS Interfaith Network
- 3:10 Break
- 3:20 How to Make A Difference: above speakers
- 4:20 Dismissal: The Very Rev. Sam Candler
- 4:30 Eucharist

## **STARTLING STATISTICS about HIV/AIDS:**

**World:** More than 34 million human beings are currently living with HIV/AIDS.

Worldwide, 90% of new infections are transmitted through heterosexual sex.

**United States:** More than 850,000 Americans (at least one in 300) are estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS. More than 40,000 people in the U.S. are becoming infected every year, and at least 14,000 die every year.

50% of new AIDS infections in the U.S. are young people under the age of 25. That is an average of two infected every hour, yet only 10% of this age group has been tested for the disease.

AIDS is the leading cause of death for African-Americans ages 25-44, and the second leading cause of death for all adults in this country ages 25-44.

**Georgia/Atlanta** - Georgia has the eighth-highest number of AIDS cases in the U.S., and Atlanta ranks tenth among metropolitan areas. More than 27,000 people in Georgia are estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS.

Although African-Americans represent only 27% of Georgia's population, 74% of new cases in the state are among this group.

### **AIDS is not over. We cannot confuse hope with victory.**

AIDS is a chronic disease without a cure. The stark realities of the AIDS epidemic continue. No one has been cured. There is no vaccine. HIV continues to spread at an alarming rate.

AIDS remains a public health emergency. The epidemic affects everyone, in every community. AIDS does not discriminate. In this country, it began its rampage among white urban males, and now it relentlessly attacks women and people of color. HIV is spreading quickly in many rural areas, especially in the Southeast. Gender, economic status, race, or sexual orientation do not protect anyone against the virus.

New drug treatments help some people with AIDS live longer, healthier lives. But these expensive medications fail for many people, and thousands of others cannot tolerate the side effects. Because the death rate has slowed, AID Atlanta has seen increased demand for our programs to assist clients with management of medical, psycho-social, and economic challenges related to living with HIV/AIDS.

The strongest, most powerful weapon against HIV/AIDS is awareness. It is the key to preventing new infections. AID Atlanta strives to provide comprehensive, in-depth AIDS education programs. If we do not fight complacency and ignorance, we risk losing too many members of this generation to a disease that we can prevent.

## **YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

**Know the facts.** Educate yourself and those you can about to raise awareness, to reduce misperceptions, fear and stigma associated with AIDS. We must continue increasing the dialogue, talking plainly and openly about HIV/AIDS so that people affected by it can feel the support they need, and so that everyone will learn how to prevent becoming infected. One person really can make a difference.

**Give your time.** Volunteer! Be a friend to an HIV-positive person, help us educate the public, or assist with another volunteer program.

**Make a donation.** As the number of AIDS cases increases, so does the need for financial resources to provide direct care and community education. Your tax-deductable contributions is urgently needed.



The above information was taken from AID Atlanta brochure dated 07/00.

1438 W. Peachtree St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30309-2955

(404)870-7700

[www.aidatlanta.org](http://www.aidatlanta.org)





**CREDITS:**

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The Very Rev. Dean Sam Candler & Mrs. Boog Candler

The Rev. Isaias Rodriguez

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The Rev. Canon Elizabeth Rechter

Julie Gohring

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**Play:**

"Secrets"

Kaiser Permanente

**"Some Considerations of Homosexuality and the Episcopal Church"****The Rev. Canon Thomas H. Conley**

Delivered to the Adult Forum

Cathedral of St. Philip

September 17, 2000

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Good morning. Our time is short today and our subject is extensive so let me without my usual introductory humor get to the issue. I want to enter several caveats or disclaimers at the beginning, and tell you what this presentation is not going to be and then some of what it is designed to accomplish.

- It will not be on the announced subject, "Sexuality in the Episcopal Church," but rather it will be, "Some Considerations of Homosexuality and the Episcopal Church." We all know that this subject is what we want to get to anyway, so let's move to that without further dance.
- This piece cannot be exhaustive or extensive because the subject is still enormously broad, so I have chosen what I feel are the more salient features and questions that I have been hearing relative to the subject.
- Third, we do not have to be where the other is on this subject to have dialogue about it. In our Dean's fine presentation last week about being and becoming a public church, it is inherent in that vision that we be a place where diversity of thought is tolerated and welcomed. We will never all agree on everything, maybe anything, and that must be all right with us. I hope most of us will agree that our relationships with one another are more important than our beliefs about any one subject and that nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ or from one another. My love for you is not conditioned by what you believe about this or any other issue.

I have already decided that I will not be separated from you or anyone over this issue, because history teaches me that this, too, will pass as a major issue in our history and corporate life. I will always separate whom you are as a person from ideas you hold. You and I are more than our opinions on this or any ecclesiological or theological matter. We need to remember that.

- This will not be a historical review of the positions taken by the Episcopal Church in relationship to homosexuality. That is a subject for another time. Most of us have lived this history, and we may not need a review so much as an interpretation of this history.

Those are some of the things this presentation will not do. Now some things I want to do with this piece.

- I want to share the result of my study and experience with you. This next June I will have been a minister in Christ's Church for forty years. I was ordained in June of 1961. I hope that experience counts for something.
- I do want to do extensive biblical interpretation of passages that have served to place us under a stringent obligation to believe that the Bible teaches only one thing about homosexuality. I want to take away that conflict and in some cases, that burden of guilt.
- I also want to deal briefly with the genesis of homosexuality as choice or a sexual predisposition with which we come packaged.
- I want to deal briefly with what we should tell the children.
- I want to mention how homosexuality may impact the church if the church ever goes on record approving of ordaining active and practicing homosexuals as priests and deacons.
- I want to talk about what I perceive are my obligations and privileges in this issue as a Christian person and a Christian priest.

And I think I ought to append this disclaimer to the rest of the piece: "The opinions expressed in



this presentation are those of Tom Conley and do not necessarily express the views of the management, either heavenly or earthly."

I also thought about turning this into a money making project for the DOK or the ECW, both for whom I have some responsibility in my Pastoral Care Department. I almost suggested that the two organizations sell much-too-ripe fruit and that I wear a raincoat and goggles so that when the appropriate time came you could heave the fruit of your choice in my direction if you took exception to my opinion. But the Dean didn't like the idea, even after I told him we could arrange for him to have a cut of the take! No deal.

I do know and understand how difficult this subject is for many people. I still remember those feelings in Columbia, S.C. where I had been reared as a racist and a homophobic, although neither of those terms was a part of my working vocabulary while I held those views. Those were two subjects whose emotional content you simply absorbed in that culture. It was in the '50's that I was in that southern city and the "N" word and the "Q" word could always get a laugh or a sneer. I remember we had a tenor in the choir at First Baptist. He had a lovely tenor voice, but it was rumored that he was "Queer" and I was warned never to be alone with him anywhere in the church.

It was only after I went to Southern Seminary that those feelings and those stereotypes got thoroughly washed and cleansed, and even then not without some real tears and heartaches in my pilgrimage. I have great empathy for those who are still struggling with this. I struggle with it but not as a personal or individual matter. That is settled with me. I struggle with it because my beloved Church struggles with it.

## I.

The question most often asked is, for many, the hub of the issue. Does not the Bible clearly state that homosexuality is an abomination to the Lord? If so, then why does that not settle the issue? Or to put it another way, the Bible says it, I believe and that settles it.

There are two passages in the Old Testament that are always quoted, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The first passage simply says: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination." The second is like unto it: "If a man lies with a male as with a woman both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them." These passages come from the section in Leviticus known in biblical studies as the Holiness Code. It is found in Leviticus, chapters 17-26. It is a code of conduct, rules, ethical practices, religious orders that Moses received from God to frame the religious and communal life of Israel in the midst of growing nationalities and increasing diversity ethnically and religiously.

The Apostle Paul brought over this Holiness Code mentality and says in Romans 1:27 "...and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameful acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error." The Holiness Code view of homosexuality is also the background for the other passages found in the New Testament. There are only about four or five references to the subject in the New Testament. None of the gospels mention the subject, and Jesus had nothing to say about it.

Let me say straightforwardly that the problem with using the Holiness Code as a prohibition against homosexuality is on shaky ground because we do not accept the rest of the Holiness Code as mandatory for Christians today. For example, we do not stone people for committing adultery (20:10). We do not punish people for sacrificing their children to Molech, then the current deity who was the greatest threat



to Yahweh-worship when Moses was writing their code. (18:23).

We do not believe in goat-demons mentioned in that same code in 17:7. We do not believe that if a man has sex with a woman in her menstrual cycle he will be cut off from God and the assembly of God as well. (20:18). We may have some ideas about it, but we do not make a distinction in our faith between clean and unclean animals. (20:25) We do not believe that a wizard, medium or a psychic should be put to death (20:27). [We give them a 900 number instead!]

We do not believe it is a sin against God to cut a tonsure in our heads or to shave off the edges of our beards (if we have one. Canon Farwell, take note) or to make tattoos on our bodies (19:28). We do not believe that priests' daughters who become prostitutes should be burned to death. We do not believe it is wrong for a priest to go into the presence of a dead body. (21:11). Virtually every priest here has disobeyed that injunction.

We do not believe a priest can marry only a virgin and only a virgin of his own kin as specified in 21:13-15. We do not believe that a man should be forbidden serving as a priest if he has a blemish, is blind, lame, has an elongated face or a limb that is too long, a broken foot or hand, is a hunchback or a dwarf, has bad eyes, eczema, scabs, or crushed testicles. (21:18-22). When our Dean interviewed me for this position, I can remember none of those questions arising in the interview. Thank God!

We do not observe all the festivals and convocations commanded in Leviticus, chapter 23. Yet all these things were to be obeyed by the people of God, thus saith the Lord. No exceptions.

We do not stone those who take God's name in vain or blaspheme God. (24:10-14) And while some of us would like to, we do not observe the year of Jubilee going back to the old homeplace, letting the ground lie fallow for a year or rescuing a kinsman who has bought property and can't pay for it. (25:25ff). We do not believe that if a kinsman loses his home you and I are obligated to have him live with us and can make no interest or profit from him (25:44-46).

We do not practice slavery. (25:44-46). We do not believe a woman who bears a male child is ceremonially unclean for 30 days, but for a female child, 66 days (12:1-5). We do not believe that if a man has an emission of semen he is unclean until the evening. (15:16). We do not believe that one who eats his or her steak rare, or eats steak tartar has "eaten blood" and is therefore cut off from God and the people. (17:10ff). We do not believe that a laborer has to be paid daily or the employer will be punished. (19:13). We do not believe that if you plant a fruit tree you must wait 5 years to eat its fruit.

None of these things we believe or observe or give much credibility to. Yet, when it comes to a couple of verses about homosexuality in this same Holiness Code, we are suddenly compelled to take them literally, promote them, quote them, and hold them up as inviolate laws from God for the Christian.

These verses about homosexuality come out of the same context as these other laws we no longer obey or think essential for our Christian faith. These verses are part of the same superstitious, pre-Copernican, pre-scientific, pre-modern world, yet we seem to have to swear obedience to them.

Note that these words about men lying with other men are in the list of all the things noted above that we are no longer subject to because Christ has superseded these statutes. Yet, we seem to exalt these verses over all their brothers and sisters. They are not tagged by Moses or the Scriptures as more important, more holy, more crucial than any of the other laws. Yet, we have made them more holy than holy itself.

Just before some of these verses there is the prohibition against adultery and it is punishable by death. If



a man lies with a daughter-in-law, death. Oops! We don't exalt that one, do we? If a man sleeps with his wife and her mother...death! If a man has sex with a woman, "in her sickness"...cut him off from the assembly, the people of God! In other words, excommunicate him!

Now we have said of so many of these verses, "Well those no longer apply to us, Christ has superseded them." Or, we say, "Well, that was for Judaism and we are not Jews." Or, we say, "Well, this was a time not as enlightened as we are, and we have to understand that and interpret some of these passages with that in mind."

Yet, when it comes to these two verses about homosexuality we must believe them, exactly like the Book says it, under penalty of "not believing the Bible," or, "disobeying the very person of God."

If you are going to take these two verses in the Holiness Code as gospel, then you are also obligated, it seems to me, to take all the rest of the Code and live by it as stringently as you do these two verses. Logical? I should think so!

The reason we have found ourselves in some consternation about this is because Paul picked up this one prohibition and transferred it over into his Epistle to the Romans (1:27). But since we know where this came from -The Holiness Code in Leviticus--we are under no more obligation to take Paul literally here than we are to take the rest of the Holiness Code literally for living our daily lives.

I have taken a lot of time on this Holiness Code issue, because I want us to be released from the notion that there is no other interpretation of these passages, and because I want us to be done with the literalism that pulls us into the vortex of disobedience to God if we do not abide by these ancient laws.

Another very important point needs to be made. None of the biblical verses refer to homosexuality as orientation because that did not begin to emerge as an idea until the 19th century. The Bible knows nothing about homosexuality as orientation or as a genetic predisposition anymore than it knew about atoms, quarks, the chaos theory or an elliptical or nearly round earth, or the existence of bacteria or viruses. The Bible only speaks about homosexual activity and virtually everytime the sacred text mentions this subject it does so against a backdrop of male temple cultic prostitution.

My good friend, Dr. Furman Hewitt, Ph.D. from Duke University and former Professor of Christian Ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, now at Duke Divinity School, has pointed out in his dissertation that almost every mention of homosexuality in the Bible has a backdrop of cultic prostitution. Dr. Hewitt has written the article on homosexuality for the Mercer Dictionary of the Bible, one of the better one-volume dictionaries on the market today.

One of the passages that is frequently quoted is the one about the story of Sodom in Genesis 19:1-26. Hewitt concludes that the sexual acts alluded to in this passage are same-sex rape acts which, during this period of history, were not so much sexual acts as a way some cultures proved dominance over another tribe or group of people. As in today's culture, rape is not about sex at all, but is about domination and control and anger. What is essential to know, Hewitt says, is that when Sodom is mentioned in other O.T. references the moral indignation is not over the homosexuality but over moral and social corruption, cynical selfishness and lack of justice. In none of the O.T. references to Sodom by other O.T. sources is any sexual sin mentioned.

Further, Hewitt traces the sexual interpretation of the Sodom story to first century Judaism when the nation was coming into contact with the Hellenistic world and the homosexuality practiced there. Only then was there an interpretation of the Sodom story as one of sexual sin.



Further, in the N.T., the words, *malakoi* (meaning soft or weak or effeminate), and *arsenokoitai*, a combination of words meaning male and sexual intercourse, are never precise in defining the activity that is forbidden. They seem to be general terms prohibiting cultic prostitution and the use of children as sexual objects by adults. These things were characteristic of the Hellenistic world that the church bumped up against in its beginnings. (T. Furman Hewitt, "Homosexuality in the Bible," *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, Watson Mills, editor, 1990, pp. 386-387).

To summarize. There were some prohibitions in Scripture against homosexual behavior, mostly connected with cultic temple prostitution. This prohibition has come from people who believed in a flat earth, goat-demons, who believed the will of God rode in sheep livers and divine dice rolled on occasion. They believed that putting speckled branches in front of sheep when they fed or watered would produce speckled offspring. Am I going to take my psychology, sociology and dictates on how to relate to homosexuals from these folk? I don't think so. And most of us don't think so either, except some of us will do that with these two verses in the Holiness Code.

Our error here is that we have taken these two verses out of the Leviticus Holiness Code, most of which we no longer believe or practice, and have exalted them to a place where, if we disobey these two verses, we do so under the pain of "not believing the Bible," or "not obeying God's word."

There are other considerations. I am a psychotherapist and made my living doing that while I went through the process of becoming a priest in the Episcopal Church. I have worked for a long time with gay folk and it is my feeling that for most of them, their homosexuality is the way they have come packaged. It has not been proven yet, but I believe that this is a genetic issue and that one day soon we will find the key to this matter. It is my experience that we come packaged the way we are. If we come packaged the way we are, then it seems to me that we ought to be accepted that way.

Now some say that homosexuality is a choice. That may be. I know many homosexuals who are really bisexual and have a choice about who their partners will be. I do not have that choice. My position is that if one has a choice to make then the making of the choice is valid. That, too, is the way some come packaged. If we have that choice, then we still have the responsibility to have dominion with that choice as well as the other choices we have with our lives.

## II.

But what will happen to the church if we do ordain practicing homosexuals to the priesthood, allow and bless same sex unions?

The first question I hear on this issue is, "Do you think it is going to happen?" My response is, "Yes." The reason is that homosexuality is here to stay. It is a reality of life and a reality of the church. It is not going away. The church will have to face it honestly and squarely. Reality cannot be ignored forever. There is an elephant in the room!

There are three basic responses to reality. We can take the lead in helping it to come with grace and hope, guide it and give it interpretation. We can scruff our toes in the dust and lament that it is coming; or we can work against its encroachment only to finally become bitter because it will eventually come anyway. I decided long ago, after much prayer and contemplation, that I should take the lead in accepting homosexuals for who they are and helping to clear the way for their full acceptance even as I believe that Jesus would fully accept them. I do this from the baptismal covenant and the promise I made there to respect the dignity and worth of every person.



I know there are many of us who accept homosexuals as persons. But some of us who do are not sure at all yet about ordaining practicing homosexuals to Holy Orders or blessing same sex unions. That is a final leap of faith we have not yet made. Yet on October 1, all the priests here will, on St. Francis Day, will bless snakes, lizards, turtles, and other assorted creatures of God. Yet, we cannot bless two human beings of the same sex who have vowed love to one another and are committing themselves to a monogamous and life-long union. There is something wrong with that picture for me.

Another reason I think it will happen is that this past Convention in Denver a resolution to have the Standing Liturgical Commission to begin drafting rites that could be used for same-sex unions failed in the House of Deputies by 2 votes. The clergy approved it by one vote and the laity rejected it by just 2 votes. The vote has been close in the last two Conventions and it may well pass in one of the next two Conventions.

Will it kill or seriously divide the church? Well, in the first place we already have a promise from the Christ that the gates of death will not prevail against the Church. If death were going to take the Church, it would have done so in a myriad of ways and through a host of opportunities in the past. Some opportune times: when Constantine made Christianity a virtual state religion in 313 C.E. While the Church was fighting over who Jesus was in those first 600 plus years. The superstition of the Medieval Church, the corruption of the Church during those Dark Ages, the Inquisitions throughout our history, the alliance of silence when Hitler rampaged over the earth and there was no word from the Confessing Church, or the devoted attempts of fundamentalism to choke the Church to death with law, legalism and myopia.

In the 1950's I heard that the integration of the South would destroy our way of life, that our churches would crumble, and that we would all go to hell in a handbasket because of the Supreme Court's ruling on May 7, 1954. Then I heard that if women were let into the leadership of the Church again we would suffer immeasurably and that the Church would flounder. We seem to have forgotten the promise that the gates of death would not prevail. Nor will it prevail this time if we ordain homosexuals and have rites to bless same-sex unions. Yes, I know, some of us think that it will be so. But look. We have many priests now who are gay and live faithful, monogamous lives with their partners.

I trust the Church of Jesus Christ is whole enough and strong enough to assimilate and to include same sex unions. What weakens the Church are those who may want to "take their marbles and go home." If this blessing of the gay unions happens, there will be some who do that. That saddens me, but it happened during the racial and integration crisis of the '50's and it will happen in this crisis.

"How do you think it will come about? I have an idea that what will happen is that so many of the dioceses will go ahead and bless unions with individual Bishops' permission, that we will eventually ratify what has already become rather common usage in some quarters. That is the way our liturgy was initially accepted in the first place. It is well known that the Church practiced a piece of liturgy before they wrote it down and long before it was finally included as an essential written part of the service. I have an idea we will do this with the ordinations and the blessings of gay unions as well. We already have a number of gay and lesbian priests, some in union and some not, who are in leadership positions of the church. Some are well known and others are not, but they are already in place in service to Christ and his Church.

But what do we tell the children? We have two sons. They are now 35 and 30. We gave them sex education about homosexuality just like we did about heterosexuality. We invited into our home our friends, many of whom are gay and lesbian; people of many races and colors and creeds have put their feet under our dining table. Our boys learned to see and experience many people who were different from us. They have turned out O.K., are married and have children. Homosexuality is real, it is not

going away, and it is incumbent upon me to accept, interpret, understand and be compassionate for all those who are different from the way I am.

Am I obligated to accept gay and lesbian people, and accept them as priests, and to accept the blessing of same-sex unions under the pain that if I do not I am not a good Christian?

We are all in varying stages of maturation in our Christian faith. We are all instructed to love God, self and neighbor, and in our baptismal covenant we commit to respect the dignity and worth of every human being. What I have never been able to comprehend is how I can love someone, respect their dignity and worth, believe that Jesus has given his life for that person or persons, vow to secure justice and peace for all persons, and not accept them as they are. That seems rather odd to me that I would have a pocket reserved in my life where I put all those not acceptable to me and then attempt to be inclusive and Christian in the rest of my life. At best that is compartmentalization.

This is not to say that those of us who have not come to the same conclusions as I have are ignorant, evil, failures as Christians or a host of other negatives that I have heard applied to those who are at a different place. We ought not to feel guilty and beat up on ourselves if we are not yet at this point of acceptance. But what I did in my life when faced with changing values concerning this and other issues was to expose those bothersome portions of my struggle to someone who could help me look at my fears, get to the bottom of them, and come full circle to a more universal acceptance of persons the way they come. I commend that approach to you.

Judgment of another person leaves us no place to stand in this life because we are all so flawed, if not with the imperfection we are judging, then with one twice as bothersome. The log in our eye renders us incapable of getting the splinter out of our brother or sister's eye. Human beings do not do well judging another because we have no outside, objective space, no "fulcrum place" to stand to make the judgment. So, my answer to the question is that we all have some distance to go to achieve wholeness in our Christian journey. If we are more whole in one area, we may be less whole in another area. No one of us has reached perfection and unconditional love. That means that we do not judge one another because we are all in the same boat. I hope all of us are working on whatever it is that keeps us from being more whole and complete in Jesus Christ. I do believe that ultimately there can be no pockets of "unacceptable" persons. Love without acceptance is not whole love.

I still have the hope that with this issue and others, there will be a day when the lion and the lamb will lie down together, when peace and justice will roll down like waters, when we will mount up as eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint, and there will be springs flowing in the desert places of our lives. I have lived with that hope for over 40 years now. It still resides in my breast. And I hope in yours.











